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REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL CONCERNING THE SITUATION IN ABKHAZIA, GEORGIA

1. The purposes of the present report are twofold: (a) to give the Council a brief account of the initial efforts to implement the mandate of the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) and (b) to outline the efforts to start a political process and the implications of the new situation that has arisen as a result of the collapse of the cease-fire and the ensuing military advances by the Abkhaz party.

A. UNOMIG

2. By its resolution 858 (1993) of 24 August 1993 the Security Council decided to establish UNOMIG on the basis of the recommendations included in my report dated 6 August (S/26250). In paragraph 2 of that resolution, the Council defined UNOMIG's mandate as follows:

> "(a) To verify compliance with the cease-fire agreement of 27 July 1993 with special attention to the situation in the city of Sukhumi;
>
> "(b) To investigate reports of cease-fire violations and to attempt to resolve such incidents with the parties involved;
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> "(c) To report to the Secretary-General on the implementation of its mandate, including, in particular, violations of the cease-fire agreement".

3. In her letter of 31 August 1993 (S/26392), the President of the Security Council confirmed the Council's acceptance of my nomination of Brigadier-General John Hvidegaard of Denmark as Chief Military Observer of UNOMIG. Brigadier-General Hvidegaard took up his command in Sukhumi on 10 September. He arrived there accompanied by three military observers from Denmark, joining the ranks of UNOMIG.

4. At the time of the adoption of resolution 858 (1993), by which the Council authorized 88 United Nations military observers for UNOMIG, an advance team of 9 military observers and 8 civilian support staff were already deployed in Abkhazia, pursuant to resolution 854 (1993) of 6 August 1993. The team had arrived in the mission area on 8 August and established its headquarters in the town of Sukhumi. Soon after its arrival, and in agreement with both parties,

the advance team initiated regular road patrols in the conflict area in order to monitor compliance with the cease-fire agreed upon on 27 July. As envisaged in the cease-fire agreement, the observers conducting these patrols established liaison with the trilateral Georgian-Abkhaz-Russian interim monitoring groups responsible for the supervision of the cease-fire on the ground. Following the establishment of the trilateral "Joint Commission" on 5 August, the leader of the team participated in its work on a regular basis in an observer capacity.

5. The initial reports received from the advance team during the month of August confirmed that the cease-fire was holding, with the interim monitoring groups apparently playing an effective role in its supervision on the ground. Similarly, the Joint Commission seemed capable of finding practical solutions to problems arising in the implementation of the cease-fire, even if numerous complaints were made by the parties alleging non-compliance with various provisions. In particular, there were frequent and increasingly vocal charges of delays in the withdrawal of heavy weapons or equipment. As a result, the parties requested the Russian Federation, whose representative presided over the meetings of the Joint Commission, to provide logistical assistance with a view to speeding up the removal of such weaponry and equipment. While UNOMIG confirmed that such support was forthcoming in different forms, including ships and other means of transport, as well as fuel, complaints continued to be levelled by the Abkhaz side concerning the slow progress of removal.

6. At the same time, the Joint Commission became deadlocked over other important aspects of the cease-fire agreement, particularly concerning the demand made by the Abkhaz side for the prompt return to prior parliamentary arrangements in Sukhumi and the insistence of Georgia on the quick return of refugees to Abkhazia. By the second week of September, differences between the parties had become serious enough to paralyse the Joint Commission, which held its last meeting on 9 September; and the interim monitoring groups began disintegrating shortly afterwards as a consequence of disagreements and hostilities among the members, thus setting the stage for the failure of the cease-fire.

7. While UNOMIG was still in the early stages of deployment, the cease-fire broke down on 16 September, when Abkhaz forces, with armed support from outside Abkhazia, launched attacks on Sukhumi and Ochamchira. Notwithstanding the call by the President of the Security Council in his statement of 17 September (S/26463) for the immediate cessation of hostilities and his condemnation of the violation of the cease-fire by the Abkhaz side, fighting continued. As a result of the intensity of the shelling and other hostilities, the UNOMIG observers were obliged to suspend all patrols as of 17 September.

8. In the next few days, the military situation developed rapidly, with serious loss of life among the civilian population of the Sukhumi and Ochamchira areas. The Georgian authorities made appeals for assistance to the Russian Federation, to the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) and - by a personal letter from the Georgian Head of State, Mr. Eduard Shevardnadze - to me. The Abkhaz side ignored all calls to halt the military action, and on 27 September the city of Sukhumi was successfully occupied by Abkhaz forces. All efforts by the Georgian forces to defend their remaining positions in Abkhazia ceased on 1 October.

9. Further deployment of both military and civilian staff of UNOMIG was suspended following the breakdown of the cease-fire on 16 September. The current strength of UNOMIG stands at 12 military observers. At present, its effective strength in Sukhumi is limited to four military observers, including the Chief Military Observer, and four civilians. Seven observers remain in Sochi, where they were when the hostilities resumed, and one in Tbilisi.

10. On 13 September, the Permanent Representatives of the Russian Federation and of Georgia presented to me a joint letter signed by the Foreign Ministers of their respective countries (S/26478). In their letter, the Foreign Ministers expressed their strong belief in the imperative need for the speediest possible deployment to Abkhazia of the full contingent of United Nations military observers and also expressed the view that additional measures might be necessary. They proposed that, if necessary, the Russian military contingent temporarily deployed in the conflict zone could be used as an international peace-keeping force. Before this letter was circulated as a document and before the proposal was considered by the Security Council, hostilities resumed on 16 September.

11. It is evident that UNOMIG's mandate has been invalidated as a result of the general breakdown of the cease-fire and the collapse of the tripartite machinery responsible for its implementation. As a matter of priority, I am exploring with the parties and with the Russian Federation the possible need for and usefulness of the continuing presence of UNOMIG with a revised mandate adapted to the radically changed circumstances. In this connection, I am also mindful, of course, of the conditions stipulated in paragraph 3 of resolution 858 (1993), making the extension of UNOMIG's mandate beyond three months contingent on substantive progress towards lasting peace.

12. Meanwhile, I propose to maintain the present strength of UNOMIG in Sukhumi, where the Chief Military Observer has already established contact with military and civilian officials who arrived after the capture of the city by Abkhaz forces. He has been assured of their cooperation and that UNOMIG will enjoy freedom of movement in monitoring the situation there. This presence will ensure that pertinent information from the ground is available when I formulate my recommendations to the Security Council on the future role and status of UNOMIG.

B. Political efforts

13. In late July, my Special Envoy, Ambassador Edouard Brunner, visited the region for discussions with both parties to the conflict as well as with officials from the Russian Federation. He had further discussions in Moscow on 3 August with the Deputy Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation, Mr. Boris Pastukhov, and other interlocutors. As I reported to the Council on 6 August (S/26264), both the Georgian and the Abkhaz parties supported a first round of negotiations in Geneva. Mr. Pastukhov also agreed that that process should start as soon as possible under United Nations auspices and with the Russian Federation acting as facilitator but, with regard to the specific date and venue, he preferred to wait and see how the cease-fire was faring before taking a position.

14. In early September, Mr. Brunner extended invitations to both parties and to the Russian Federation to send representatives to Geneva for discussions at the senior working level towards a political settlement of the conflict. These discussions were arranged for 14 and 15 September. The Russian Federation indicated that it would accept, provided that both the parties accepted. The Georgian side accepted the invitation, but the Abkhaz side declined, saying that such talks would be "premature" as the Georgians had not withdrawn all their military equipment from Abkhazia in accordance with the cease-fire agreement of 27 July.

15. After the violation of the cease-fire on 16 September, Mr. Brunner made further efforts to call the participants together, proposing to hold a first round of talks in Geneva on 30 September and 1 October.

16. On 29 September I discussed the situation with the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Mr. Andrei Kozyrev, during his visit to United Nations Headquarters in New York. I have also discussed it with other concerned parties. My Special Envoy has continued his efforts to pursue a negotiated settlement and hopes to be able to bring the parties to the conflict to a venue outside the region in the near future for separate talks to explore the possibilities for progress in this radically changed situation.

C. Observations

17. As indicated in the statement issued by my Spokesman on 24 September 1993, I have been greatly saddened by the suffering inflicted on the innocent civilian population in the conflict area as a result of the renewal of hostilities. I was particularly shocked by the deliberate attacks on Georgian aircraft on three consecutive days, which resulted in a heavy toll of human life. I deeply deplore the killing of Mr. Zhiuly Shartava, Chairman of the Defence Council and Council of Ministers of the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia, and other persons who remained in Sukhumi after 27 September. There are also alarming reports of atrocities and allegations of ethnic cleansing which, if confirmed, deserve the condemnation of the international community. Once again, I call upon the Abkhaz leadership to exercise maximum restraint regarding the civilian population remaining in Sukhumi and elsewhere in Abkhazia.

18. I am also distressed by reports of the large numbers of civilians who have been displaced. The exact numbers are not known but it has been estimated that as many as 100,000 people have been displaced by the fighting in and around Sukhumi. The problem has been compounded by the Abkhaz advance south-east from Sukhumi and a consequent further displacement of the local population. Many are still on the road or have taken to the mountains.

19. Mr. Shevardnadze has issued an urgent appeal to Governments for humanitarian assistance and I add my voice to his in requesting aid for those who have been made homeless by the conflict. The United Nations Representative in Tbilisi has convened a meeting of United Nations system representatives, diplomatic representatives and non-governmental organizations to review the situation and arrange assistance. On 1 October, the Department of Humanitarian Affairs made an emergency appeal, calling particular attention to the need for

food, warm clothing, medical supplies and logistic support for the transport of relief supplies. A United Nations relief flight has been organized.

20. With the assistance of my Special Envoy, I shall consult with the parties and with the Russian Federation in the coming days with a view to determining how best the United Nations can assist in making progress towards a comprehensive political settlement. Within the next two weeks or so I hope to be in a position to present recommendations to the Security Council relating both to the future of UNOMIG and to the political aspects of the United Nations role in trying to end the conflict in Abkhazia.